

State Food Stamp dispersals are the largest ever.

By Deb Gray

"You must have loved the poor people," Tevye addressed God during the musical Fiddler on the Roof. "Why else would you make so many of them?"

Other Biblical references point to the virtues of poverty. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven," Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount. And in another reference, He said, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."

But many Americans aren't content with their poverty when they are competing with a shrinking dollar and rising food costs.

So, in 1967 the United States government intervened to help give its poor its daily bread. The result was the food stamp program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which helped feed 50,000 people its first year.

One of 12 Americans

Since 1967, the program has snowballed into the largest welfare program in our nation's history. According to recent estimates, one out of 12 Americans will use food stamps this year.

And in Nebraska the program grows each month. In December, 15,670 households in the state received food stamps. That total increased to 16,183 households in January.

That total is the largest number of people receiving food stamps in Nebraska's history, according to Russell Wallace, director of the Nebraska food stamp program.

Wallace attributed this increase to two factors: The rising rate of unemployment and the time of year. More food stamps are issued during winter, he said, because increased employment opportunities are available during summer.

Lancaster County showed a slight decrease in the number of households receiving food stamps last month, according to Wallace. In December 1,229 households participated, compared with 1,176 households in January.

More are eligible

The actual number of persons receiving food stamps in Lancaster County during the last two months was 3,441 persons in December and 3,337 in January, Wallace said.

"That really isn't much of a drop, and it isn't indicative of anything. The total of recipients usually fluctuates one way or the other every month," he said.

One problem in administering a welfare program is defining poverty. The Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs defines a poor person as one who lacks the resources to purchase a nutritionally adequate diet. By their standards, 25 to 27 million Americans are officially poor.

Although no estimates are available on the number of students in Lancaster County who are eligible for food stamps, several employes in state welfare offices and food stamp recipients said there are many more



Photo by Steve Boerner.

people eligible for food stamps than are now receiving them.

"It's hard to determine these figures, but there's

many, many people eligible for stamps who don't care to participate in the program," Wallace said.

Advertising not needed

Although some groups such as the Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs have campaigned to alert millions of American poor they are eligible for welfare, Wallace doesn't feel this is necessary.

"Food stamps have been in the papers since 1965. I can't believe that there's anyone in the state who isn't aware of them. It's a popular subject and it's continually in the papers," he said.

Although most everyone is aware of food stamps, not everyone knows qualifications for the program.

Here's how a student living alone or a student who cooks his own meals in a house with other roommates can qualify for food stamps. Totals increase for a house of two or more students.

A person's eligibility depends on two things: His monthly income and the amount of money in savings or other assets.

Income below \$194

A person applying for food stamps must have less than \$1,500 in savings. Household goods, cars, and tools necessary for employment are not assessed in that total.

A student's adjusted income must be below \$194 a month. If a person makes more than that, he could be eligible anyway.

Tuition, mandatory fees, and housing and utility bills that exceed 30 per cent of the student's income are deductible from his monthly income, Wallace said.

Food stamps are redeemable for any edible item. Alcohol, cigarettes, paper and cleaning supplies are not included.

Because of another federal regulation, fewer students will qualify for the program after March 10, Wallace said. In January, welfare offices received a directive from the Department of Agriculture to exclude students who are claimed as tax deductions and whose parents are not members of an eligible household.

Graduated scale

The amount you pay for food stamps and the amount of food you can buy with these stamps is figured on a graduated scale depending upon individual income and the size of the family, Wallace said.

The following examples, which are totals for one person, are taken from the top, middle and bottom of the income scale. Because a person is one income bracket, Wallace said, that is no indication he'll be in that same position the next month. If a student has high expenses one month—like tuition or medical bills—he could be dropped into a lower income bracket for that month.

Income	You Pay	Worth
\$0-\$19.99	0	\$46
\$100-\$109.99	\$18.00	\$46
\$190-\$194	\$36.00	\$46

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33-county area of Eastern Nebraska. There is also a field office in Grand Island which oversees the remaining 60 Nebraska counties.

Although synonymous with counties, Moore said, his office refers to each county as a "food stamp project."

He explained that the food stamp program is operated by the federal, state and county governments. The state and county governments are responsible for the distribution of the food stamps, he said.

Normally, the field office does not deal with individual cases, Moore said. Only when they are conducting studies or investigations will his office contact individual participants.

The field office is directly under the supervision of a district office which in turn is under a regional office in Chicago. The Chicago office is directly answerable to Washington, Moore said.



James Moore, director of the food stamp field office.

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